

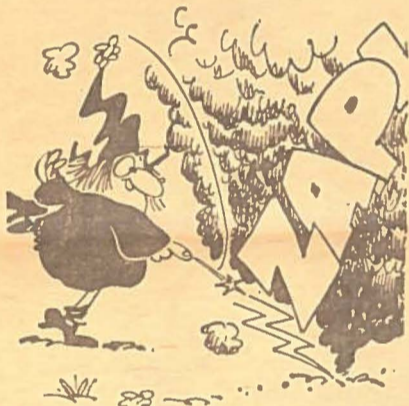
BORN AMID SCORN AS THE YELLOW KID BACK IN 1896, NEWSPAPER COMICS ARE INTO THEIR DIAMOND JUBILEE WITH 100 MILLION READERS AND GROWING RECOGNITION THAT THE FUNNIES ARE A GENUINE ART FORM.

FUNNY

By DON SINGLETON



SKEEZIX



BROOM-HILDA



LI'L ABNER



ORPHAN ANNIE



BRINGING UP FATHER



YELLOW KID



SUPER DUPER

F RAME 1. An unmistakable profile: Jaw as sharp and square and strong as a brick; nose chiseled out of granite; eye a firm-stroke squint; mouth curved up at the corner, ever so slightly, into a smile.

On his wrist is a rectangular yellow object with knobs and dials and what looks like a miniature viewing screen. Small zigzag lines radiate from the object, giving the hint that it is electronic; but, so there can be no mistake, it is marked with an arrow and a label: "2-WAY WRIST TV."

Dick Tracy Super-sleuth; pursuer and bringer - to - justice of Pouch and Pruneface and Flattop and Haf-and-Haf and who knows how many other bizarre evildoers! The first to fly to the moon! The first to use 2-WAY WRIST RADIO and 2-WAY WRIST TV! How many crimes has he solved? How many lives has he saved? How many times has he safeguarded the national interest?

But, if Dick Tracy is important and successful as a cartoon detective, he is even more important in another way—he is himself a national institution. That brick-jawed profile of his, lying on the newsstand or the front porch or the breakfast table in millions and millions of American homes from Maine to Montana, from New York to Los Angeles, from 1931 to today, has become the hallmark of each new Sunday morning.

Perhaps more than any other cartoon character, Dick Tracy means Sunday morning; and, perhaps more than any other morning of the week, Sunday morning means the funnies.

The funnies. A jumble of characters from the past and the present and the future. People who always speak in balloons, always in CAPITAL LETTERS, always ending every sentence with an exclamation point! People and piglets and prehistoric monsters, moving along in a series of panels, colored on Sunday and black and white the rest of the time.

Little Orphan Annie, with her famous blank eyes like pairs of capital letter O's — O O — and her constant canine companion: "ARF!" Dennis the Menace, caricature of a million precocious suburban kids. Alley Oop, whose forearms are rivaled only by Popeye's. Winnie Winkle, who has made it, agelessly and stylishly, from the 1920s to the 1970s, and Mutt and Jeff, who haven't changed much at all since they first appeared in 1907, and the whole gang from Gasoline Alley, who grow fat and old and have children and grandchildren along with their readers. Li'l Abner and Joe Palooka, eternally naive, eternally and basically good.

If those characters and the thousands of others who have populated the funnies

have one thing in common, it is their citizenship—they are all Americans, through and through.

The comic strip is strictly an American invention. It was created 75 years ago this year, in New York City. In fact, the Newspaper Comics Council and THE NEWS—a paper which always has been known for its creative featuring of comics—are putting on a Diamond Jubilee Show in Central Park on Sept. 12. From noon until 5 p.m., many outstanding cartoonists, including Alfred Andriola (Kerry Drake), Irwin Hasen (Dondi) and Mort Walker (Beetle Bailey) will present demonstrations of their artistry on the Central Park Mall.

The skills that are used in producing comic strips were by no means unknown prior to the closing years of the 19th century. It's just that until then, nobody thought to put all the elements together.

For decades, American and European newspapers and magazines had been publishing cartoons, some of them with captions and others with balloons containing the characters' speech. But everything was always contained in a single drawing.

There had been picture stories, too, in which a theme was developed through a series of drawings—this particular art form, in fact, is centuries old, having been used by the ancient Egyptians in temple carvings and sacred writings.

But it took American ingenuity to bring all of the elements together into a money-making form, ingenuity and competition.

The competition was between the two strong men of the New York City newspaper publishing scene: Joseph Pulitzer, publisher of the New York World, and William Randolph Hearst, publisher of the New York Morning Journal.

It was actually Pulitzer who is credited with putting out the first newspaper comic, a creation by his employee, artist Richard Outcault.

Outcault was the artist-author of a popular cartoon feature entitled Down in Hogan's Alley, which chronicled the unsavory activities of the people who lived in a New York City slum. One of the regular characters in this cartoon was a youth with a round, bald head, two huge jughandle ears, a face only a mother monkey could love, and a white shirt that hung from his neck to his bare feet. Sometimes, the shirt carried the kid's speeches; otherwise it was pure white.

In 1893, Pulitzer had purchased a four-color rotary press, which he used in printing the World's Sunday supplement. His mechanical staff had been experimenting for months, trying to make the press print an acceptable yellow color. Finally, early in 1896, the printers felt they had figured out the right combination. All they needed was something to test the new ink on. Feb. 16 was picked as the date.

That was where Outcault came in. Pulitzer's engraving room foreman,

Charles Saalburgh, chose a work of Outcault's, a three-quarter page cartoon entitled The Great Dog Show in M'Googan Avenue. Saalburgh decided to leave the cartoon all black-and-white except the jug-eared kid's shirt, which was inked in yellow.

Almost overnight, the cartoon became the hit feature of the paper. The Yellow Kid was credited with selling millions of copies of the World, possibly because of his rough-and-tumble antics.

And, because of the World's use of journalism which was occasionally sensational and sometimes of questionable accuracy, the Yellow Kid had his name dragged in the mud—he became a part of a derogatory newspaper term. According to the Random House Dictionary of the English Language, yellow journalism is that which is: "a. sensational, esp. morbidly or offensively so: *That yellow rag carried all the gory details.* b. dishonest in editorial comment and the presentation of news, esp. in sacrificing truth for sensationalism: *Objective reporting isn't always a match for yellow journalism.*"

Hearst was not to be beaten, however. He decided to beef up the Journal's color Sunday supplement, so he went out looking for cartoonists to hire. He didn't have to look far—just a little over a year after the Yellow Kid first appeared in the pages of the World, Hearst hired Outcault—complete with the Yellow Kid—away from Pulitzer.

While the Yellow Kid is generally accepted as the first American comic character, there are some experts who argue that, on a technicality, the title should belong to two young incorrigibles named Hans and Fritz, who first appeared in the Journal on Dec. 12, 1897, in a comic strip called The Katzenjammer Kids, by Rudolph Dirks.

Experts point out that while the Yellow Kid contained most of the elements of today's comic strip—a permanent cast of characters and the use of balloons for speech—the cartoon always appeared in a single panel. It wasn't until the Katzenjammers that the use of a strip of panels to develop a story became standardized.

Outcault wasn't finished after creating the Kid, however. His next creation was one whose name has lived on in shoes and hair styles today—Buster Brown.

Outcault and Dirks were the first two of a series of great turn-of-the-century cartoonists who have come to be known as the Old Masters of the comic strip: George Herriman, Winsor McCay, Charles Kahles, Bud Fisher and Frederick Oppen.

Herriman was the creator of Krazy Kat, a classic strip which detailed the intricate, interdependent relationships of Krazy; a brick-throwing mouse (Zip! Remember?) and Offissa Pup, the peace-making strong arm of the law.

McCay brought Little Nemo into the world in 1905; Kahles introduced Hairbreadth Harry, the forerunner of the adventure comic strips, in 1906; Bud

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Fisher's long-lived Mutt and Jeff in 1907; and Frederick Oppen's Happy Hooligan, born in 1899, went on to provide a model for such serio-comic figures as actors Charlie Chaplin and Ben Blue.

Here is just a brief chronology listing some of the better-known comics and the years in which they appeared:

1900-1919: Abie the Agent, Harry Hershfield, 1910; Polly and Her Pals, Cliff Sterrett, 1912; Bringing Up Father, George McManus, 1913; Gasoline Alley, Frank King, 1919; Barney Google and Snuffy Smith, Billy DeBeck, 1919; Popeye, Elzie Segar, 1919.

1920s: Winnie Winkle, Martin Branner, 1920; Our Boarding House, Gene Ahern, 1920; Out Our Way, J. R. Williams, 1922; Smitty, Walter Berndt, 1922; Moon Mullins, Frank Willard, 1923; Orphan Annie, Harold Gray, 1924; Tarzan, Rex Maxon (after Edgar Rice Burroughs), 1929; Buck Rogers, John Dille, 1929.

1930s: Blondie, Chic Young, 1930; Joe Palooka, Ham Fisher, 1930; Dick Tracy, Chester Gould, 1931; Terry and the Pirates, Milton Caniff, 1934; Flash Gordon, Alex Raymond and Don Moore, 1934; Mandrake the Magician, Lee Falk and Phil Davis, 1934; Li'l Abner, Al Capp, 1934; Alley Oop, V. T. Hamlin, 1934; Henry, Carl Anderson, 1934; The Phantom, Lee Falk and Ray Moore, 1936; Prince Valiant, Hal Fisher, 1937; Nancy, Ernie Bushmiller, 1938.

1940s: Brenda Starr, Dale Messick, 1940; Mr. Breger, Dave Breger, 1942; The Sad Sack, George Baker, 1943; Kerry Drake, Alfred Andriola, 1943; Buz Sawyer, Roy Crane, 1943; Rip Kirby, John Prentice, 1946; Priscilla's Pop, Al Vermeer, 1946; Steve Canyon, Milton Caniff, 1947.

1950s: Peanuts, Carl Schulz, 1950; Beetle Bailey, Mort Walker, 1950; Dennis the Menace, Hank Ketcham, 1951; On Stage, Leonard Starr, 1957; Miss Peach, Mel Lazarus, 1957; B. C., Johnny Hart, 1958; Rick O'Shay, Stan Lynde, 1958.

1960s: Ponytail, Lee Holley, 1960; Apartment 3-G, Alex Kotzky, 1962; Wizard of Id, Brant Parker and Johnny Hart, 1964; Eck and Meek, Howie Schneider, 1965; Small Society, Morrie Brickman, 1966; Dateline: Danger! Aiden McWilliams and John Saunders, 1968.

The thread that runs through that list of comic classics has many strands. Some of the changes that have occurred have been the simple result of passing time — Gasoline Alley, for example, couldn't have been born until there was the automobile, and therefore the filling station.

Other changes have resulted from various social and political factors, such as the wars (Popeye followed World War I; several popular comic figures were born in World War II) and the Great Depression (Apple Mary, by Mary Orr, was created in the era of the breadline in the early 1930s; a few years later, as economic conditions improved, Allen

Saunders took over the strip and revamped it into the long-running Mary Worth).

Some of the styles were set in the very beginning, becoming patterns which were able to survive, with different characters, from generation to generation.

There is the mischievous child format, for example. The rough-and-tumble Yellow Kid and the raucous Katzenjammer Kids — katzenjammer, in German, means "the yowling of cats" — set a certain style of comic art. This form involves children whose antics drive their parents and other assorted adults to distraction.

Although three generations separate Hans and Fritz from Dennis the Menace, and although the levels of humor in the strips are often quite different, there are many similarities that span the years.

Another classic mold was constructed in the opening years of the century by Charles Kahles, who created Sandy Highflyer in 1903 and Hairbreadth Harry in 1906. These two strips, many believe, set the pattern of adventure comics.

Sandy's adventures in a balloon for example, possibly broke ground for such successors as Terry and the Pirates and Steve Canyon; Harry's exploits, saving damsels in distress from dastardly villains, might have made him an early Dick Tracy, Superman, Phantom or Lone Ranger.

Another genre that has spanned the generation gap is the family situation comedy. Bringing Up Father, in 1913, spun a thread that can be seen woven through such strips as The Gumps, The Bungle Family, Gasoline Alley, Out Our Way, Our Boarding House, Blondie, Mickey Finn, Priscilla's Pop and others.

Gasoline Alley is unique in comics in that its characters were allowed to age, year by year. The strip was started in 1919 by Frank King, on the suggestion of Joseph Medill Patterson, publisher of The News, whose shrewd judgment resulted in the creation of several strips which survive today.

The Gasoline Alley crowd were small-town people who sat around in an alleyway behind a filling station and talked a lot — there weren't very many automobiles in 1919. There were Doc, Walt and Bill. Two years after the strip's creation, Patterson decided the strip needed a baby. Since there were no married men involved, King solved the problem by having a baby dropped off on the Wall-ets' doorstep.

The baby, Skeeze, grew up to fight for his country in 1942, to marry in 1944, to have a son in 1945 and a daughter in 1949, and, just this year, to celebrate his 50th birthday.

Another pattern was established by Krazy Kat. In this, the characters were examined on a psychological level — Krazy loved Ignatz, the mouse, but Ignatz hated Krazy, and bounced a brick off the cat's skull at every opportunity. The cat, the mouse and Offissa Pup

would constantly reveal their innermost thoughts to one another.

Shades of Krazy Kat can be seen in Pogo, which started in 1948, and in one of the most popular of the new comics in America, Peanuts, whose creator, Charles Schulz, has had spaceships named after his characters.

Schulz's dog, Snoopy, like Krazy Kat, can have his adventures all in his head — Snoopy does much of his "tripping out" while lying flat on his back atop his dog house.

Peanuts is one of those strips which, even though in a classic pattern, is so big and so popular as to be in a class by itself. Others with this stature include Dick Tracy, Blondie, Little Orphan Annie and Li'l Abner.

Both the late Harold Gray (Annie) and Al Capp (Abner) used their strips as formats for their political and social beliefs. Gray's editorializing cost him some cancellations by newspapers over the years. And Capp's knack of satirizing his enemies has made his strip one of the most closely watched of all.

Many cartoonists and others involved in the creation and production of the funnies feel that comics aren't taken seriously enough in America. In Europe, Asia and South America, they point out, American comics are accepted not only as good entertainment, but as good art. There are annual seminars where the work of American cartoonists is examined by professional art critics.

Schulz believes that there is need for more professional criticism of comics: "Perhaps we suffer from not having the same kind of written criticism that playwrights and novelists have," he said in a telephone interview from his home in Sebastopol, Calif. "Admittedly, it's nice not to be torn apart by a critic; but perhaps we would all do better if such an eye were kept on us."

Some experts feel that there are bigger problems than the shortage of criticism. The expansion of television as an entertainment and information medium, these people say, will result in the erosion of the comic strip as an art and entertainment form.

But most of the people directly involved in the creation and publication of the comics are more optimistic.

"Oh, I'm sure that the comic strip will last," Al Capp said, with the chuckle that always escapes him just before he springs a gag. "I'm not worried about the comic strips making it — I'm worried about me making it."

Capp said he believes comics have a future because newspapers have a future.

"I think there'll always be newspapers in this country," he said, "because newspapers serve a necessary purpose — newspapers will be around forever."

"And, as long as there are newspapers, the comic strip will always be as inevitably a part of the newspaper as the front page." Another chuckle escaped him. "Not as funny as the front page, of course, but just as important."



DICK TRACY



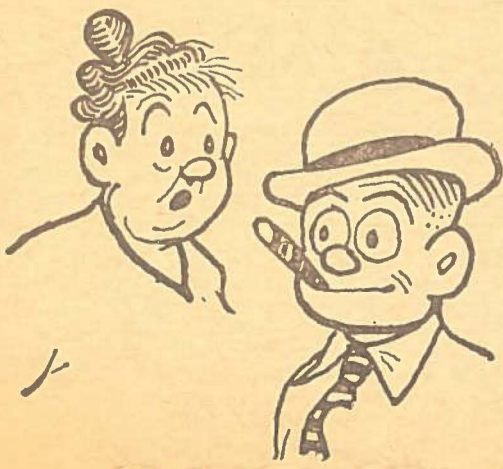
KRAZY KAT



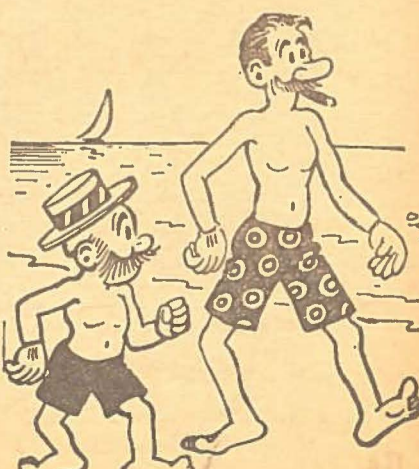
BRENDA STARR



FRIDAY FOSTER



MOON MULLINS



MUTT AND JEFF



DONDI

ON STAGE